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Man as God's Spiritual or Physical Image?

Theomorphic Ethics versus Numinous Ethics and Anthropomorphic Aesthetics in Early Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, and the New Testament

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1. Introduction

Within the framework of this volume-length enquiry into the relation between anthropology and ethics in early Judaism and the New Testament, I will focus on the anthropological notion of man as God's image and examine whether this notion has particular ethical implications. Given the fact that the fourth symposium of the Corpus Judaeo-Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti project focuses on the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in their relation to the New Testament, I have been asked to pay less, if any attention to the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo of Alexandria, and Flavius Josephus, and will hence only briefly refer to a few, but important occurrences in these writings. At the same time I will provide a broader context for the views encountered in early Judaism and the New Testament by comparing them with the perspectives found in Graeco-Roman philosophy. The notion of man as God's image (or, alternatively, the anthropomorphic view on God as the *effigies hominis et imago*, "the image and likeness of man," according to the Epicurean position in Cicero's *De natura deorum* 1.103) is a matter of considerable debate between various schools of Graeco-Roman thought.

Comparative analysis of this kind reveals that what all three of these roughly contemporary entities of early Judaism, the New Testament, and ancient philosophy have in common, with respect to our topic, is that they all waver between a physical and an intellectual understanding of man as God's image. This draws into question several assumptions, such as that Jewish views on the issue might tend to be primarily physical (or representational, in the sense that the entire, integral human being, as God's image,

represented God on earth), whereas ancient philosophical views were predominantly, if not exclusively, intellectual. In the interests of the comparative approach, the present article is not divided into three distinct parts addressing the various areas of Jewish, early Christian, and ancient philosophical anthropological views; rather the structure follows the categorization of physical and intellectual interpretations of man as God's image in texts of various provenance. A further advantage of this approach is that it is no longer necessary to delineate too sharply between Jewish and Christian writings. This is often virtually impossible in any case, as scholars continue to disagree about the Jewish or Christian identity of some authors.

In the current structure, the most relevant aspect is whether a text's understanding of man as God's image is physical or intellectual. In each section I will bring together Jewish, Christian, and ancient philosophical interpretations of a similar nature (or an apparently similar nature). In each instance, I will focus on the question of whether a specific anthropological understanding of man as God's image implies a particular ethics. It seems that both a physical and a spiritual understanding of man as God's image can have ethical implications. But whereas a spiritual, intellectual interpretation typically involves an ethical outlook, this is not necessarily the case with a physical interpretation. In part, a physical understanding of man as God's image may seem to be more concerned with aesthetics than with ethics. If, on the other hand, it is ethically charged, its ethical reasoning is largely based on the numinous, awe-inspiring, and somewhat fearsome unique correspondence between God and man, which is adduced in order to highlight the sacrosanctity of man and thus protect human beings against the onslaught of other human beings. Generally speaking, then, physical interpretations have either aesthetic or numinous overtones. Spiritual, intellectual interpretations, on the other hand, seem to be more reflective and to imply an ethical imperative for human beings to emulate God's own moral example. In this way, I weave a broader interpretative discourse into the textual analysis of the texts under consideration.

2. Physical interpretations of God as man's image, or man as God's image

2.1 The theomorphic turn and the development of a "numinous ethics" of the sacrosanctity of human beings in the Jewish Scriptures, early Judaism and the Letter of James

Before focusing on relevant writings from early Judaism, I shall briefly discuss the Jewish Scriptures. Leaving aside for a moment the book of

Genesis and its familiar theomorphic passage on the image of God, according to which "God created humankind in his image" (Gen 1:26–27), I proceed here from the related, but inverted, anthropomorphic view of the book of Ezekiel, which does not describe man as God's image, but rather presents God as "something that seemed like a human form":

> And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was *something that seemed like a human form*. (Ezek 1:26)[1]

Given that Ezekiel's description of God in terms of "something that seemed like a human form" is considered to predate Genesis (or the redaction of Genesis), one can assume that Ezekiel's anthropomorphic definition of God (God appears in the likeness of man) is modified and reemphasized in a theomorphic way in the book of Genesis: man is created in the likeness of God. In this sense, it may well be that we witness a "theomorphic turn" in the book of Genesis. This change from an anthropomorphic to a theomorphic view is a simple but highly significant inversion, which – as we shall see – is paralleled in particular ancient philosophical criticisms of the Epicureans' anthropomorphic image of God. It seems natural that the anthropomorphic understanding of God as resembling a human form is basically physical. Yet in the book of Genesis, the theomorphic understanding of man as God's image also seems still to be largely corporeal, despite its being contrasted with an anthropomorphic understanding. This can be glimpsed in the reason given for the prohibition of murder in the rules of the Noahic covenant. According to Gen 9:6, God determines that:

> Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind. (Gen 9:6)

It is apparent that some kind of physical resemblance between God and humankind is presupposed, which provides the rationale for why one should not murder a fellow human being. This line of reasoning is numinous, in the sense that it seems to be based on the awe-inspiring awareness or insight that God and human beings are somehow similar, and that the sacrosanctity of human beings lies in the sacred and inviolable nature of God himself. This line of reasoning also emerges in subsequent early Jew-

[1] The biblical writings are normally quoted in the New Revised Standard Version, and most early Jewish writings after *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J.H. Charlesworth; 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985). Passages from classical literature are quoted after the English translations in the Loeb Classical Library series, unless otherwise noted, and early patristic literature after the Ante-Nicene Fathers series, with small modifications when necessary.

ish texts, as well as in early Christian writings. In the *Life of Adam and Eve* (whose Jewish or Christian provenance is still disputed), the resemblance between God and Adam is indeed taken in a physical sense, as it is Adam's "face and likeness" (*vultus et similitudo*) that is said to have been made in the image of God (*L.A.E.* 13:3). This physical, even "facial" interpretation of the likeness between God and humankind seems to be part of the ultimate consequence of the view that Adam is in God's image: Adam, and not idols, is the proper image of God. This anti-idolatrous tone of the doctrine or notion of man as the image of God is already present in the Jewish Scriptures. As regards our enquiry into the relation between anthropology and ethics, one could say that the undertone of some of these passages is that idolatry necessarily equals bad ethics. The full consequences of this view that humans, not idols, are the image of God are drawn in the *Life of Adam and Eve*, as the archangel Michael is said to have ordered the angels to worship Adam as God's image (*L.A.E.* 13:1–15:3; cf. 39:1–3 = *Apoc. Mos.* 12:1–2; 33:5; 35:2). There is a strong emphasis, then, on the physical, facial likeness between God and humankind.

In the *Life of Adam and Eve* no ethical considerations follow from the resemblance between God and humankind, but such reflections are given in *2 Enoch*. In this writing, the image of God provides the foundational notion for ethics. Enoch teaches his sons that it is forbidden to insult fellow human beings because man has been created "in a facsimile of God's face":

> The LORD with his own two hands created mankind; in a facsimile of his own face, both small and great, the LORD created them. And whoever insults a person's face, insults the face of a king, and treats the face of the LORD with repugnance. He who treats with contempt the face of any person treats the face of the LORD with contempt. (*2 Enoch* 44:1–3)

This reminds us of the ethical consequences drawn from the physical similarity between God and human beings in Gen 9:6, forbidding the shedding of human blood and ordering the requital of the victim's blood by that of the perpetrator, "for in his own image God made humankind." This manner of ethical reasoning, which bases the sacrosanctity of human beings on their numinous correspondence with the Creator, also underlies the early Christian Letter of James, whose author warns the readers against slandering their fellow human beings:

> . . . no one can tame the tongue – a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God (καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ καταρώμεθα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς καθ' ὁμοίωσιν θεοῦ γεγονότας). From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. (Jas 3:8–10)

A similar close identification of man's physical body with the image of God himself, used as an argument to care for the former as for the latter, is also found in the *Testament of Isaac*, where, at the moment of Isaac's definitive farewell, his son Jacob receives the following instruction:

> And our father Isaac said, "Jacob, my beloved son, keep my injunction which I lay down today that you preserve my body. Do not profane the image of God by how you treat it; for the image of man was made like the image of God; and God will treat you accordingly at the time when you meet him and see him face to face. He is the first and the last, as the prophets have said." When Isaac had said this, the Lord took his soul from his body and it was white as snow. (*T. Isaac* 6:33–7:1)

Even though the author differentiates between Isaac's soul and his body, it is the body, not the soul, which is recognized as the image of God, and which relates almost one-to-one to the image of God himself. The language of meeting God "face to face" is hardly metaphorical here. Here too the sacrosanctity of the human body, even after it has died, is based on its analogy with the image of God himself.

A somewhat similar ethical reasoning is developed in *4 Ezra*, but then applied as a moral argument against God himself. Ezra, deploring the prospect of the small number of the saved in the world to come, as compared to the many who have been created, pleads with God to show mercy to his creation. He disagrees with the validity of the analogy which the interpreting angel draws with the seeds sown by the farmer, of which only a few will come up (*4 Ezra* 8:41). Ezra disputes this simile and answers God as follows:

> But man, who has been formed by your hands and is called your own image because he is made like you, and for whose sake you have formed all things – have you also made him like the farmer's seed? No, O Lord who are over us! But spare your people and have mercy on your inheritance, for you have mercy on your own creation. (*4 Ezra* 8:44–45)

Although it is not explicitly stated that the similarity between man and God is physical, this seems not unlikely. It is hard to imagine that *4 Ezra* has a spiritual, intellectual understanding of the image of God, as it views the mind as having been made "out of the dust like the other created things" (7:62–63). But whatever the precise nature of this image, what is most relevant here is that Ezra here considers a type of ethics which may also be binding for God himself. It derives directly from the close similarity between God and man, which is far more intimate than the relation between a farmer and his seed, precisely since man is God's own image because he is made like God. Ezra's ethical considerations are subsequently dismissed, however, and Ezra is summarily rebuked and silenced (8:47, 55), on account of some further justifications which attempt to exonerate God (8:56–60). Ezra's plea for universal redemption can perhaps be re-

garded as articulating a deeply religious attempt to establish an all-embracing morality which is conclusive and salutary for both God and man.

The development of such an ethics, at least as a moral code for human behaviour, is what we have seen in the passages from Genesis, *2 Enoch*, the Letter of James, and the *Testament of Isaac*. In these texts, we detect a strong ethical defence of the inviolable and sacred nature of human beings, which rests on the similarity between God and humans: a similarity that has particularly physical overtones. These notions, in which ethical, anthropological, and theological considerations are in unison, are not unique to the Jewish and Christian writings mentioned, but are also found in ancient philosophical writings, as we shall see in the next section.

2.2 The sacrosanctity of human beings according to Aristotle and Aristotelian commentators

The Jewish-Christian attribution of human sacrosanctity to the closeness between human beings and God is paralleled in deliberations in Aristotle's *Metaphysica*, which then reverberate and are further elaborated in subsequent commentators. According to Aristotle, reflecting on the first substances, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the planets:

> Our forefathers in the most remote ages have handed down to us, their posterity, a tradition, in the form of a myth, that these substances are gods and that the divine encloses the whole of nature. The rest of the tradition has been added later in mythical form with a view to the persuasion of the multitude and to its legal and utilitarian expediency (πρὸς τὴν πειθὼ τῶν πολλῶν καὶ πρὸς τὴν εἰς τοὺς νόμους καὶ τὸ συμφέρον χρῆσιν); they say these gods are in the form of men or like some of the other animals (ἀνθρωποειδεῖς τε γὰρ τούτους καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων ὁμοίους τισὶ λέγουσι), and they say other things consequent on and similar to these which we have mentioned. (Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1074b, 1–14)

In this passage Aristotle differentiates between two stages in views of the gods: a first stage in which the gods were regarded as identical with the first substances, and a subsequent phase in which they were attributed anthropomorphic traits, "with a view to the persuasion of the multitude and to its legal and utilitarian expedience." It is this purpose which is then spelled out in the comments on Aristotle's *Metaphysica*, as can be discerned from the commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who was a public teacher of Aristotelian philosophy at the turn of the second century C.E., probably at Athens. Alexander explains how, in his view, the anthropomorphic picture of the gods, as beings in human shape, persuaded *hoi polloi* to adhere to the laws and to do what was good for them:

> They [i.e., the forefathers] formed myths, such as that today Zeus was born from Rhea, and that for that reason it is necessary for all to gather together and celebrate the birthday

of the god and feast together in their houses. But having made them [i.e., the gods] in human form (ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνθρωποειδεῖς αὐτοὺς ποιήσαντες), they [i.e., the forefathers, the myth-makers] did not do so in vain but for the benefit of *hoi polloi*, the multitude (πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον τῶν πολλῶν). Because, wanting to turn men from beating one another, they [i.e., the forefathers] made the gods in the form of man, intimating in this way that he who beats a fellow human being wantonly beats and insults the divine form (βουλόμενοι γὰρ ἀποτρέψαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἀπὸ τοῦ τύπτειν ἀλλήλους πεποιήκασι τοὺς θεοὺς ἀνθρωποειδεῖς, αἰνιττόμενοι διὰ τούτου ὅτι ὁ τύπτων ἄνθρωπον τὸ θεῖον εἶδος τύπτει καὶ περιυβρίζει). And not only did they make them [i.e., the gods] in human form, but for the extra benefit of the human race, they also made the gods similar to some other living beings. (Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Comm. Metaph.* 710 [trans. mine])

In this way, Alexander provides a powerful ethical justification for an anthropomorphic representation of the gods. In his understanding, the notion of the divine form (τὸ θεῖον εἶδος) functions in a very similar way to the understanding of the notion of the image of God in *2 Enoch*, as we saw above. The close resemblance assumed between "the divine form" (τὸ θεῖον εἶδος) and "the form of man" (ἀνθρωποειδής: "like a man, in human form") implies that somehow the likeness between the gods and men is also bodily. It is this bodily resemblance that is the reason why human beings should refrain from beating their fellow humans. Their sacrosanctity is rooted in "the divine form."

2.3 Other ancient philosophical justifications of the "appropriateness" of the human form for depicting God

Aristotelian philosophers such as Alexander of Aphrodisias justify the human form of the gods in ethical terms; other ancient philosophers, too, defend the similarity in form between God and human beings, but give other reasons.[2] The Greek orator and popular philosopher Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40/50–after 110 C.E.), for instance, stresses the similarity in shape between the gods and man. In a discourse on man's conception of God, Dio attributes his own view to Phidias (*Dei cogn.* 55–83 [*Or.* 12]), the famous Greek sculptor, who was trying to justify his great statue of Zeus as an appropriate statue of the god. According to Phidias, since the mind and intelligence of the gods cannot be represented in art, artists need to resort to the human body in their representations of the gods, for the following, symbolic reason:

[2] On ancient philosophical views on the anthropomorphic images of the gods, cf. also K. ALGRA, *Conceptions and Images: Hellenistic Philosophical Theology and Traditional Religion* (Mededelingen van de Afdeling Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks 70.1; Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 2007); P. VAN NUFFELEN, *Rethinking the Gods: Philosophical Readings of Religion in the Post-Hellenistic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Mind (νόος) and intelligence (φρόνησις) in and of themselves no sculptor or painter will ever be able to represent. For all men are utterly incapable of observing such attributes with their eyes or of learning of them by inquiry. But as for that in which this intelligence manifests itself (τὸ δὲ ἐν ᾧ τοῦτο γιγνόμενόν ἐστιν), men, having no mere inkling thereof but actual knowledge, fly to it for refuge, attributing to God a human body as a vessel to contain intelligence and rationality (ἀνθρώπινον σῶμα ὡς ἀγγεῖον φρονήσεως καὶ λόγου θεῷ προσάπτοντες), in their lack of a better illustration, and in their perplexity seeking to indicate that which is invisible and unportrayable by means of something portrayable and visible, using the function of a symbol (συμβόλου δυνάμει χρώμενοι) and doing so better than certain barbarians, who are said to represent the divine by animals – using as their starting-point symbols which are trivial and absurd. (Dio Chrysostom, *Dei cogn.* 59 [*Or.* 12])

In Dio's reasoning, the human body is an appropriate symbolic starting-point for a representation of the gods, because in the case of human beings, their intelligence and rationality are housed in a body. For this reason, Dio presumes, from the point of view of art,

the kinship between gods and men [is intended to be shown] by the mere similarity in shape, being already in use as a symbol (τὴν δὲ ἀνθρώπων καὶ θεῶν ξυγγένειαν αὐτό που τὸ τῆς μορφῆς ὅμοιον ἐν εἴδει συμβόλου). (Dio Chrysostom, *Dei cogn.* 77 [*Or.* 12])

In a similar vein, the Middle Platonic philosopher Maximus of Tyre (2d century C.E.) also justifies the representation of the gods in an anthropomorphic way:

The judgement of those who established images in human form is anything but unreasonable (καὶ οὐκ ἄλογος ἡ ἀξίωσις τῶν τὰ ἀγάλματα εἰς ἀνθρωπίνην ὁμοιότητα καταστησαμένων). If the human soul is something very close to God and like Him in its nature, it is surely not reasonable to clothe what is most similar to it in an entirely foreign covering. (Maximus of Tyre, *Dissertationes* 2.3)

Hence, the human body can be regarded as appropriate clothing, not only for the soul, but also for the gods themselves, at least on the level of depiction. Maximus' view is shared by other Platonic philosophers, such as Porphyry (234–ca. 305 C.E.), who, in his defence of the physical resemblance between human beings and the statues of the gods, seems to resort intentionally to the Jewish concept and terminology of man as the "image of God." He supports his view with a reference to the writings of Moses. According to Porphyry,

It is reasonable that the forms of the statues are in the manner of a man because man, which is the finest of creatures, is thought also to be the image of God (ἀνθρωποειδῆ δὲ τῶν ἀγαλμάτων εἰκότως εἶναι τὰ σχήματα, ἐπεὶ τὸ κάλλιστον τῶν ζῴων ἄνθρωπος εἶναι νομίζεται καὶ εἰκὼν θεοῦ). It is possible to confirm this doctrine from another passage which asserts by that which is written in it that God has fingers: "And he gave to Moses

the two tablets which were written by the fingers of God" (Exod 31:18). (Porphyry, *Contra Christianos*, frg. 76 [ed. von Harnack]; = frg. 207 [trans. Berchman])[3]

If Porphyry is indeed consciously referring to the Jewish terminology of the "image of God," this may well reflect his high estimation of the Jews,[4] and also the more general appreciation of Jews, Syrians and other ancient nations in several Neoplatonist authors. Such a view is, for instance, expressed in the assumption of Iamblichus (ca. 245–ca. 325 C.E.) that the Greek philosopher Pythagoras was a pupil of Mochos of Sidon, who, in Iamblichus' description, became blended with the figure of Moses himself.[5] A similar confluence of Pythagorean and Jewish ideas seems also to be present in a text by Pseudo-Eurytus the Pythagorean, a Neo-Pythagorean text from the Graeco-Roman period quoted in the writings of Clement of Alexandria. As Clement claims:

> I think it worthwhile also to adduce the utterance of Eurysus [= Eurytus] the Pythagorean, which is as follows, who in his book *On Fate*, having said that the "Creator, on making man, took Himself as an exemplar," added, "And the body is like the other things, as being made of the same material, and fashioned by the best workman, who wrought it, taking Himself as the archetype." (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.5.29)

Here, too, we have the same physical understanding of the similarity between God and human beings, in a wording which resembles the book of Genesis.

However, these positive views on the physical resemblance between the gods (or their statues) and human beings were not shared by all philosophers. If Porphyry referred to the Jewish Scriptures in support of his anthropomorphic view on man as God's image, Celsus (*fl.* between 175 and 181 C.E.), a fellow Middle Platonic philosopher who preceded Porphyry by about half a century, strongly disagreed. In his polemic against Christianity, Celsus criticized the physical connotations of the Jewish-Christian understanding that man was created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). According to the Christian writer Origen, who responded to Celsus' attack,

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[3] Porphyry is also the author of a separate writing *On Statues* (Περὶ ἀγαλμάτων). On Porphyry and the Jews, see R.M. BERCHMAN, *Porphyry Against the Christians* (Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition 1; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 23–24.

[4] For Porphyry's sympathies for Judaism, cf. J.G. COOK, *The Interpretation of the Old Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 23; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 150–247.

[5] For Iamblichus' view that Pythagoras was a pupil of Moses, see G.H. VAN KOOTEN, "Moses/Musaeus/Mochos and His God Yahweh, Iao, and Sabaoth, Seen from a Graeco-Roman Perspective," in *The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity* (ed. G.H. van Kooten; Themes in Biblical Narrative 9; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), 107–138 (121–126).

he [i.e., Celsus] failed to understand to what characteristic of man the words "in the image of God" apply, and that this exists in the soul which either has not possessed or possesses no longer "the old man with his deeds," and which, as a result of not possessing this, is said to be in the image of the Creator. He says: Nor did he make man his image; for God is not like that, nor does he resemble any other form at all. (ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἐπιστήσας, ἐν τίνι τῶν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὸ "κατ' εἰκόνα" τοῦ "θεοῦ" χαρακτηρίζεται, καὶ ὅτι ἐν τῇ ἢ μὴ ἐσχηκυίᾳ ἢ μηκέτι ἐχούσῃ ψυχῇ "τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον σὺν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτοῦ", ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ἔχειν ταῦτα χρηματιζούσῃ "κατ' εἰκόνα" τοῦ κτίσαντος, φησὶ τό· *Οὐδ' ἄνθρωπον ἐποίησεν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ· οὐ γὰρ τοιόσδε ὁ θεὸς οὔτ' ἄλλῳ εἶδει οὐδενὶ ὅμοιος.*) (Origen, *Cels.* 6.63)

In Origen's view, Celsus clearly misunderstands the reference to the image of God in Gen 1:26–27 as a reference to a bodily, physical image; rather, Origen holds, this image is located in the soul and is of a moral nature. In his criticism of the physical nature of man's similarity with God, however, Celsus differs from the other ancient philosophers discussed above, who were willing to insist on the utilitarian advantage of the physical resemblance between God and humankind (Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias), its value as a symbolic starting-point for the recognition of the kinship between gods and men (Dio Chrysostom), and the reasonableness of establishing the images of the gods in human form (Maximus of Tyre), because "man . . . is thought also to be the image of God" (Porphyry). One particular school of ancient philosophers, however, the school of the Epicureans, goes even further in emphasizing the mere physicality of this resemblance. This approach is in line with the general thrust of their materialistic worldview.

2.4 Anthropomorphic aesthetics according to the Epicureans

As we shall see, the emphasis the Epicureans place on the physical resemblance between gods and human beings issues first and foremost from their materialistic philosophy. This resemblance is primarily aesthetic rather than ethical. Perhaps such an aesthetic colouring is the most far-reaching, extreme consequence of a physical understanding of man as God's image. The Epicureans' line of argument is also characterized by a heavily anthropomorphic and anthropocentric tendency.

These Epicurean anthropological and theological views can most easily be studied in Cicero's exposition and subsequent criticism of the Epicurean position in his *De natura deorum*.[6] The many aspects of Epicureanism ad-

[6] On Cicero's use of Epicurean sources for his depiction of the Epicurean position in his *De natura deorum*, see H. ESSLER, "Cicero's Use and Abuse of Epicurean Theology," in *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition* (ed. Jeffrey Fish and Kirk R. Sanders; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), ch. 7, 129–151.

dressed in Cicero's writing, in addition to the central question of the nature of the gods, include the "many views [which] are put forward about the outward form of the gods (. . . *de figuris deorum . . . multa dicuntur*)" (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.2). The expository speech on behalf of the Epicureans (1.18–56) is put in the mouth of Gaius Velleius, introduced as "a member of the Senate, accounted by the Epicureans as their chief Roman adherent" (1.15). The speech is subsequently criticized by Gaius Cotta (1.57–124), a representative of the Academics, at whose house the dialogue is situated (1.15). In his speech Velleius finds fault with the pre-Epicurean and non-Epicurean schools for assuming that God could be without a corporeal form, whereas – according to the Epicureans – "it is proper to God to possess not merely some shape but the most beautiful shape" (1.26), i.e., the shape of man, as is explained in the course of Velleius' speech. According to Velleius, in line with Epicurean materialism, "divine incorporeity is inconceivable, for an incorporeal deity would necessarily be incapable of sensation" (1.30), as "mind naked and simple, without any material adjunct to serve as an organ of sensation, seems to elude the capacity of our understanding" (1.26–27). Indeed, as P.G. Walsh puts it, "The notion of a pervasive Mind, investing the world with eternal movement and life, is implicitly contrasted with the Epicurean notion of anthropomorphic gods."[7] The anthropomorphic form and appearance of the gods is the explicit topic of 1.45–50, once Velleius has discussed the existence and nature of the gods. Since one of the arguments for the anthropomorphic *form* of the gods repeats Velleius' main argument for the *existence* of the gods, I shall briefly introduce this argument at this point. The Epicureans, to quote Cotta's paraphrase of Velleius' arguments, do not conjecture "from the splendour and the beauty of creation" that gods exist, but rather derive this existence from the idea of god which has been implanted in their minds (1.100). According to Velleius, humankind has an innate concept of the gods, a conception (*notio*) imprinted by Nature on the minds of all human beings, referred to as a "preconception of the gods" (*anticipatio deorum*), or "prior notion of the gods" (*praenotio deorum*), a rendering of Epicurus' own terminology of πρόληψις:

> . . . the gods exist, because nature (*natura*) herself has imprinted a conception (*notio*) of them on the minds of all mankind. For what nation or what tribe of men is there but possesses untaught some "preconception of the gods" (*anticipatio deorum*)? Such notions Epicurus designates by the word πρόληψις, that is, a sort of preconceived mental picture of a thing, without which nothing can be understood or investigated or discussed. . . . For the belief in the gods has not been established by authority, custom or law, but rests on

[7] P.G. WALSH, *Cicero*, "The Nature of the Gods": *Translated with an Introduction and Notes* (Oxford World's Classics; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 155.

the unanimous and abiding consensus of mankind; their existence is therefore a necessary inference, since we possess an instinctive or rather an innate concept of them (*insitas eorum vel potius innatas cognitiones habemus*); but a belief which all men by nature share must necessarily be true; therefore it must be admitted that the gods exist.[8] And since this truth is almost universally accepted not only among philosophers but also among the unlearned, we must admit it also being an accepted truth that we possess a "preconception" (*anticipatio*), as I called it above, or "prior notion of the gods" (*praenotio deorum*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.43–44)

This natural argument for the existence of the gods from the consensus of all people, Velleius claims, goes hand in hand with the conviction that their *nature* is blessed and immortal, or eternal:

We have then a preconception of such a nature that we believe the gods to be blessed and immortal. For nature, which bestowed upon us an idea of the gods themselves, also engraved on our minds the belief that they are eternal and blessed. (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.45)

It is this argumentation concerning the existence and the nature of the gods that is now continued in Velleius' exposition of the *form* of the gods:

But the mind strives to strengthen this belief [i.e., in the existence of the gods and in their eternal and blessed nature] by trying to discover the form of god, the mode of his activity, and the operation of his intelligence (*Sed ad hanc confirmandam opinionem anquirit animus et formam et vitae actionem mentisque agitationem in deo*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.45)

The topic of the mode of life of the gods, and perhaps also the issue of the operation of their intelligence, is covered in 1.51–56. The issue of the divine form, on the other hand, which concerns us in this article, is first discussed in 1.46–50 and approached through two types of argument:

For the divine form we have the hints of nature (*natura*) supplemented by the teachings of reason (*ratio*) (*Ac de forma quidem partim natura nos admonet, partim ratio docet*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.46)

The first type of argument, the "natural argument," is indeed a reiteration of the argument which Velleius used for declaring the existence and nature of the gods, now applied to the appearance of the gods:

From nature all men of all races (*omnes omnium gentium*) derive the notion of gods as having human shape and none other; for in what other shape do they ever appear to anyone, awake or asleep? (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.46)

[8] Views among modern scholars differ on the question of whether the Epicureans believed in a truly corporeal existence of the gods, independent of the anthropomorphic form in which they presented themselves as an innate idea in the human mind. For the affirmative position, see D. KONSTAN, "Epicurus on the gods," in *Epicurus* (ed. J. Fish; n. 6), 53–71, for the negative position D. SEDLEY, "Epicurus' theological innatism," in *Epicurus* (ed. J. Fish; n. 6), 29–52.

Velleius confirms that this is the type of argument he used before when, in introducing his second type of argument, he states that he does not wish "to make primary concepts (*primae notiones*) the sole test of all things" (1.46); here he uses the same sort of terminology of "preconception of the gods" (*anticipatio deorum*), "instinctive or rather innate concepts" (*insitae vel potius innatae cognitiones*), or "prior notion of the gods" (*praenotio deorum*) which he applied in 1.43–44 to describe Epicurus' πρόληψις, the preconceived mental picture of the gods. So the conviction of the gods' human form, too, is based on the primary, innate concepts of the gods that are shared by all human beings. Velleius' Academic opponent Cotta summarizes Velleius' reasoning as follows: "our minds possess a preconceived notion of such a character that, when a man thinks of god, it is the human form that presents itself to him" (1.76). It is relevant to adduce Cotta's criticism of Velleius' train of thought here, as Cotta also explicitly criticizes the reasoning of other philosophers who justify an anthropomorphic understanding of the gods. He is particularly scornful of the justification of philosophers such as Aristotle and Alexander of Aphrodisias who, as we have seen above (see ch. 2.2 above), emphasized the "legal and utilitarian expedience" of divine anthropomorphism: the notion that it was beneficial to portray the gods in human form, since this would discourage human beings from insulting their fellows for fear of insulting "the divine form." According to Cotta, anthropomorphic depictions of the gods are indeed due to such philosophical considerations, or to plain superstition, or to artistic vanity:

> Human shape has been thus assigned to the gods either by the deliberate contrivance of philosophers, the better to enable them to turn the hearts of the ignorant from vicious practices to the observance of religion, or by superstition, to supply images for men to worship in the belief that in so doing they had direct access to the divine presence. These notions moreover have been fostered by poets, painters and artificers, who found it difficult to represent living and active deities in the likeness of any other shape than of man. (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.77)

This censure is then further strengthened by Cotta's remark that such an anthropomorphic understanding of the form of the gods is not based on the consensus of all people, since other peoples – such as the Egyptians, Syrians, and "any almost of the uncivilized races" – also harbour different views (1.81; cf. Cotta's similar criticism of the alleged consensus of all people regarding the existence of the gods in 1.62–64).

Velleius' natural argument from the consensus of all people is then followed by an argument based on reason, or rather by two kinds of rational arguments. The first of these arguments is an aesthetic argument, focusing on the beauty of the human form, whereas the second rational argument is based on the claim that rationality is confined to the human form. The first,

aesthetic rational argument consists of the claim that since God as the most exalted being must also be the most beautiful, and since the most beautiful shape is the human form, God must possess human shape (*Nat. d.* 1.47–48; cf. 1.76).[9] Indeed, as Cotta summarizes this argument to Velleius: "your school holds that god possesses bodily parts because of their beauty (*propter pulchritudinem*)" (1.92). Cotta's main problem with this argument is that it reflects "man's belief in his own superior beauty," just as every other species will prefer its own species (1.77–80).

Velleius' second rational argument in favour of the anthropomorphic appearance of the gods is based on the following chain of argument, consisting of four successive assumptions which lead to a final conclusion:

> . . . since it is agreed that (i) the gods are supremely happy, and (ii) no one can be happy without virtue, and (iii) virtue cannot exist without reason and (iv) reason is only found in the human shape, it follows that the gods possess the form of man. (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.48)

Whereas Cotta agrees with the first three assumptions that the supreme happiness of the gods consists in virtue and reason, he cannot endorse the fourth assumption that "reason is only found in the human shape." Cotta thus summarizes Velleius' argument from this perspective: "The third reason you advance is that no other shape [than the human shape] is capable of being the abode of intelligence" (1.76–77). As Cotta indicates, this view indeed reflects Epicurus' own remark that he has "never seen a mind endowed with reason and with purpose, that was embodied in any but a human form" (1.87). Velleius' criticism of the Presocratic, Platonic, and Stoic philosophers in 1.25–41 related precisely to their view that the gods could possess some other form, such as that of the cosmos, the heavenly bodies, or any other shape. In the opinion of Cotta, however, Velleius' assumption that "reason is only found in the human shape" is not a legitimate, logical next step in his chain of argument, but "a headlong plunge":

> You add, neither can reason exist save embodied in human form. Who do you suppose will grant you this? For if it were true, what need had you to arrive at it by successive steps? You might have taken it for granted. But what about your successive steps? I see how you proceeded step by step (*gradatim*) from happiness to virtue, from virtue to reason; but how from reason do you arrive at human form? That is not a step, it is a headlong plunge. (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.89)

Two issues arise in this debate that are directly relevant to our topic, first in Velleius' exposition and then in Cotta's reply.

[9] For an analysis of this debate on the beauty of God, see K. KLEVE, "On the Beauty of God: A Discussion between Epicureans, Stoics, and Sceptics," *SO* 53 (1978): 69–83.

(1) To start with the former, having drawn the conclusion from his chain of argument that "the gods possess the form of man" (1.48), Velleius immediately feels the need to qualify his conclusion by stating that the form of the gods, despite its anthropomorphic shape, is not corporeal but only resembles human corporeality:

> . . . it follows that the gods possess the form of man. Yet their form is not corporeal, but only resembles bodily substance; it does not contain blood, but the semblance of blood (. . . *hominis esse specie deos confitendum est. Nec tamen ea species corpus est, sed quasi corpus, nec habet sanguinem, sed quasi sanguinem*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.48–49)

This view subsequently attracts severe criticism by Cotta, who deems this jargon incomprehensible (1.68, 71, 74). He assumes that the rationale behind Velleius' wording is that he opts for a kind of fine corporeality of the gods which ensures their eternity, whereas a normal, human-like, gross kind of corporeality would almost necessarily have implied their temporality and destruction:

> In his desire to avoid the assumption of a dense cluster of atoms, which would involve the possibility of destruction and dissipation, he says that the gods have not a body but a semblance of body, and not blood but a semblance of blood. . . . I am aware that what you maintain is that the gods possess a certain outward appearance, which has no firmness or solidity, no definite shape or outline, and which is free from gross admixture, volatile, transparent. Therefore we shall use the same language as we should of the Venus of Cos: hers is not real flesh but the likeness of flesh (*corpus illud non est sed simile corporis*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.71, 75)

It is very intriguing that the same combined view of an anthropomorphic form with only a bodily semblance occurs in Paul's writings, when he attempts to express God's presence in Christ in the form of a body. It seems almost as if Paul is experimenting with Epicurean terminology[10] when he writes, in describing God's sending of his Son (Rom 8:3–4):

> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ υἱὸν πέμψας ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας), and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:3–4)

Read from an Epicurean perspective, Paul seems indeed to communicate that God sent his divine Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας), as if despite the Son's anthropomorphic form his (divine) corporeality is different from that of the humankind, so that there is

[10] For Paul's acquaintance and polemical encounters with Epicureans, see A.J. MALHERBE, "The Beasts at Ephesus," *JBL* 87 (1968): 71–80; G. TOMLIN, "Christians and Epicureans in 1 Corinthians," *JSNT* 20 (1998): 51–71. Cf. also Acts 17:18.

only a bodily semblance. Although the meaning of Paul's statement of God's involvement with, and care for humankind in Rom 8:3–4 is not at all Epicurean, as the Epicureans believe that the gods do not extend their providential care to the cosmos and its inhabitants but remain secluded in their own divine impassiveness and calmness (ἀταραξία; see *Nat. d.* 1.50–56), the similarity at the level of terminology is very striking. This ambiguity between anthropomorphic form and bodily semblance is also found in Phil 2:6–8, when Paul describes the descent and humiliation of Christ,

> who, though he was in the form of God (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων), did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave (μορφὴν δούλου λαβών), being born in human likeness (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος). And being found in human form (καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος), he humbled himself. (Phil 2:6–8)

I shall reflect below on the meaning of "the form of God" in this passage. For now, I draw attention to what, against an Epicurean background, seems to be an ambiguity between the anthropomorphic form of Jesus Christ, and his birth "in human likeness," which concerns him, in an equally ambiguous sense ὡς ἄνθρωπος, "as," or "like a human being."

The impression that Paul shares a particularly Epicurean terminology and discourse seems to be confirmed by 1 Cor 15:44, which uses a different, but related Epicurean reasoning about the immortality of the gods. Here Paul, in his explanation of the resurrection of the dead, argues that, "If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body (εἰ ἔστιν σῶμα ψυχικόν, ἔστιν καὶ πνευματικόν)" (1 Cor 15:44). This argument resembles what Velleius puts forward as Epicurus' proof of divine immortality, referred to as the principle of equilibrium. The gods, who, according to Velleius, are in human form, but imperceptible to the senses because their anthropomorphic form "is not corporeal, but only resembles bodily substance" so that their substance and nature "is perceived not by the senses but by the mind, and not materially or individually" (1.46–49), are also immortal:

> In the sum of things everything has its exact match and counterpart. This property is termed by Epicurus ἰσονομία, or the principle of uniform distribution. From this principle it follows that if the whole number of mortals be so many, there must exist no less a number of immortals, and if the causes of destruction are beyond count, the causes of conservation also are bound to be infinite. (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.50)

It is notably Cotta's paraphrase of this Epicurean argumentation which brings out the resemblance with Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor 15:44. In Cotta's understanding of the principle of "equilibrium," as he translates the Epicurean principle of ἰσονομία, Velleius actually says that "because there is mortal substance there must also be immortal substance (*quoniam sit natura mortalis immortalem etiam esse oportere*)" (1.109). As Cotta puts

it, "On that showing, because there are mortal men, there are also some that are immortal (*Isto modo quoniam homines mortales sunt sunt aliqui inmortales*)" (1.109). This manner of reasoning does indeed come very close to Paul's logic in 1 Cor 15:44 that "If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body," and to his quasi-corporeal understanding of the resurrected body.

Whatever the reasons for the Epicurean overtones of Paul's discourse (which may have to do with the possibly partially anti-Epicurean setting of the polemics in which he became involved), it is fascinating to notice that his christological reflections on the anthropomorphic form and human resemblance of Jesus Christ, and on the underlying logic of the resurrection, seem to show that he was aware of the wider debate of his day about the form of the gods. I will return to this issue briefly in dealing with the physical understandings of the image of God in christological contexts in ch. 2.6 below; here it will suffice to draw attention to the ancient philosophical backdrop of some Pauline passages.

(2) The other reason why this debate between Velleius and Cotta in Cicero's *De nature deorum* is relevant for our current topic is contained in Cotta's reply to Velleius' final rational argument for the anthropomorphic form of the gods, based on the latter's assumption that "reason is only found in the human shape" (1.48). Having criticized the "headlong plunge" which Velleius takes in his otherwise gradual chain of argument, Cotta criticizes his conclusion that "the gods possess the form of man" (1.48) in the following way:

> Nor indeed do I understand why Epicurus preferred to say that gods are like men rather than that men are like gods (*maluerit Epicurus deos hominum similes dicere quam homines deorum*). "What is the difference?" you will ask me, "for if A is like B, B is like A." I am aware of it; but what I mean is, that the gods did not derive the pattern of their form from men (*Video, sed hoc dico, non ab hominibus formae figuram venisse ad deos*); since the gods have always existed, and were never born – that is, if they are to be eternal; whereas men were born; therefore the human form existed before mankind, and it was the form of the immortal gods (*ante igitur humana forma quam homines, eaque erant forma Dei immortales*). We ought not to say that the gods have human form, but that our form is divine. (*Non ergo illorum humana forma sed nostra divina dicenda est*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.90)

This response is highly relevant for the present undertaking, as Cotta criticizes the anthropocentricism of Epicurean anthropology and theology, and suggests that, given the priority of the gods, any resemblance between the gods and humankind should be formulated in theocentric and hence theomorphic terms, rather than in an anthropocentric and anthropomorphic phraseology. In terms directly pertinent to the topic of the present article, Cotta aptly paraphrases the Epicurean position as fostering the view that "god is the image and the likeness of man (*deus effigies hominis et ima-*

go)" (1.103). In the Epicurean understanding, God is the image of man, rather than man the image of God. Cotta's criticism of Epicurean anthropomorphism, and his plea for theomorphism, is reminiscent of the similar theomorphic turn which took place in the Jewish Scriptures, as discussed above: the anthropomorphic perspective of Ezekiel, in which the figure of God was described as "something that seemed like a human form" (Ezek 1:26), altered to the theomorphic perspective of Genesis, in which man was depicted as the image of God (Gen 1:26–27; see ch. 2.1 above).

Cotta's plea for a theomorphic anthropology and his criticism of the anthropomorphic anthropology of the Epicureans are supported by the exposure of a grave inconsistency in Epicurean thought. If the Epicureans do indeed deny that the gods are involved in the creation of the universe and concerned with providential care of this universe and its human inhabitants (cf. 1.50–56, 100), it becomes inexplicable, as Cotta points out to Velleius, that the form of the immortal, eternal gods should resemble the form of human beings:

> What I want to know is, how did such a piece of good luck happen (for according to your school nothing in the universe was caused by design) – but be that as it may, what accident was so potent, how did such a fortunate concourse of atoms come about, that suddenly men were born in the form of gods (. . . *ut repente homines deorum forma nascerentur*)? Are we to think that divine seed fell from heaven to earth, and that thus men came into being resembling their fathers? (*Seminane deorum decidisse de caelo putamus in terras et sic homines patrum similes extitisse?*) I wish that this were your story, for I should be glad to acknowledge my divine relations! But you do not say anything of the sort – you say that our likeness to the gods was caused by chance (*Nihil tale dicitis, sed casu esse factum ut essemus similes deorum*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.90–91)

Hence, in Cotta's own, theomorphic anthropological views, "men were born in the form of gods," and human beings are the offspring of the gods' semen and resemble their divine fathers,[11] as opposed to the Epicurean views which regard the anthropomorphic resemblance between gods and human beings as based on mere coincidence. As we shall see later in Part 3 of the present article, Cotta's justification of a theomorphic anthropology is supplemented with an ethical reasoning, according to which human beings should emulate the gods. Although, as we shall see, the Epicurean view is not devoid of such emulation of the gods (as human beings should indeed imitate the gods' impassive and calm ἀταραξία), Cotta's own ar-

[11] For the notion of being born from God, see G.H. VAN KOOTEN, " 'Born of God, Begotten by God': John's Hellenizing Interpretation of the Jewish Pneuma-Sarx Antithesis in Terms of Divine versus Human Generation," in *Dualistic Anthropology* (ed. G.H. van Kooten and Jacques van Ruiten; Themes in Biblical Narrative; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming 2014); and for the notion of God's fatherhood, see F. ALBRECHT and R. FELDMEIER, eds., *The Divine Father* (Themes in Biblical Narrative; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming 2014).

gumentation shows a perfect synthesis of theomorphic anthropology and ethical philosophy. Velleius' Epicurean anthropology, on the other hand, is not only anthropomorphic but ultimately understands this anthropomorphic resemblance between gods and human beings in an aesthetic, rather than in an ethical sense. As construed in Cicero's debate between Velleius and Cotta in his *De natura deorum*, at any rate, Velleius' Epicurean anthropomorphic aesthetics are contrasted with Cotta's theomorphic ethics.

2.5 Physiognomic and aesthetic understandings of the image of God

As we saw in the previous section, the Epicurean justification of the gods' anthropomorphic form, and thus the emphasis on the anthropomorphic nature of the resemblance between gods and human beings, is partially based on a predominantly if not exclusively aesthetic outlook. God, as the most exalted being, must also be the most beautiful; and since the most beautiful shape is the human form, God must possess human shape (1.47–48). Therefore, indeed, according to Cotta's summary of Velleius' view, "god possesses bodily parts because of their beauty (*propter pulchritudinem*)" (1.92).

This aesthetic understanding of the resemblance between God and human beings is very similar to the view known as the physiognomic understanding of man as the image of God, which occurs in both Jewish writings and Greek pagan sources. According to this physiognomic approach, there is a clear correlation between man's physical appearance and his inner state or identity. In Book 5 of *1 Enoch*, for instance, Enoch describes the birth of his great-grandson Noah, and tells how Noah's father Lamech becomes so worried by the resplendent appearance of this child that he turns to his own father, Methuselah, and shares his concern with him:

> I have begotten a strange son: He is not like an (ordinary) human being, but he looks like the children of the angels of heaven to me; his form is different, and he is not like us (καὶ ὁ τύπος ἀλλοιότερος, οὐχ ὅμοιος ἡμῖν). His eyes are like the rays of the sun, and his face glorious. It does not seem to me that he is of me, but of angels. (*1 En.* 106:5)

Methuselah subsequently contacts Enoch, who dwells among the angels at the ends of the earth, having disappeared from among humankind (cf. Gen 5:24). Methuselah rephrases Lamech's anxiety in the following way: "unto my son Lamech a son has been born, one whose image and form are not like unto the characteristics of human beings (καὶ ὁ τύπος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ εἰκὼν αὐτοῦ 'οὐχ ὅμοιος ἀνθρώποις καὶ τὸ χρῶμα αὐτοῦ')" (106:10). Methuselah also explains that because of the birth of this child, Lamech "became afraid and fled, and he did not believe that he (the child) was of him but of the image of the angels of heaven" (106:12). Enoch is then able to calm and encourage Methuselah by pointing out that "The Lord will surely

make new things upon the earth" (106:13) and that he should reassure Lamech "that the son who has been born is indeed righteous; and call his name Noah, for he shall be the remnant for you" through the great destruction of the coming deluge (106:18). Noah, in this passage, is clearly depicted as the new, postdiluvian man who, like the first human being Adam before him, is created in the image and form of God. The appearance of this image is described with distinctively physical overtones, which reveal Noah's true identity. In this sense the passage expresses a form of physiognomy, since it is Noah's physical outward appearance that leads his grandfather Methuselah to seek out Enoch for his expert advice. As in the case of the Epicurean understanding of the resemblance between gods and human beings, this resemblance is not of an ethical nature, but rather aesthetic and concerned with the outward appearance of this special child, even though it does reveal something about his actual identity.

Other examples in Jewish sources of physical, physiognomic understandings of man as God's image include the *Testament of Naphtali* in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, although this writing could equally be Christian. Nevertheless, regardless of its Jewish or Christian origins, its physiognomic views are very distinct. As his starting-point, the author of the *Testament of Naphtali* takes Naphtali's physical, light-footed swiftness as a reflection of his inner being:

> Since I was light on my feet like a deer, my father, Jacob, appointed me for all missions and messages, and as a deer he blessed me. For just as a potter knows the pot, how much it holds, and brings clay for it accordingly, so also the Lord forms the body in correspondence to the spirit, and instills the spirit corresponding to the power of the body. And from one to the other there is no discrepancy, not so much as a third of a hair, for all the creation of the Most High was according to height, measure, and standard. And just as the potter knows the use of each vessel and to what it is suited, so also the Lord knows the body, to what extent it will persist in goodness, and when it will be dominated by evil. For there is no form or conception which the Lord does not know since he created every being according to his own image (Ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι πᾶν πλάσμα καὶ πᾶσα ἔννοια ἣν οὐκ ἔγνω Κύριος· πάντα γὰρ ἄνθρωπον ἔκτισε κατ' εἰκόνα ἑαυτοῦ). (*T. Naph.* 2:1–5)

According to this passage, the specific physical characteristics of Naphtali's body reflect the features of his spirit, and vice versa. The mutual correspondence of Naphtali's body and spirit has been ordained by God, apparently also in accordance with his foreknowledge, which is based on the fact that God created "every being according to his own image." For this reason, no figure (πλάσμα) of the body or act of thinking (ἔννοια) of the spirit is unknown to him. It appears that God's image comprises both an intellectual and a physical aspect. There is also a relation here between anthropology and ethics, as God's formation of the body is informed by his foreknowledge of the extent to which the body "will persist in goodness, and when it will be dominated by evil." The ethical behaviour involved

therefore seems predetermined and can be physiognomically detected from one's outward appearance.

This physiognomic understanding of the image of God is not only present in Jewish sources, but is also found in pagan Greek writings. Physiognomy as such is current in Greek thought, and, as Maria M. Sassi remarks, despite the long history of the concept – stretching back to the Mesopotamia of ca. 1500 B.C.E. – the "focus on personal character (and a reflection on the relation between physical and psychical facts) seems to be a Greek innovation."[12] The ethics involved is highly "aestheticized," as moral perfection is equated with a particular physical human shape. If this is true, it means that the study of the interdependence of body and soul as described in the *Testament of Naphtali* is related to this Greek discourse. But whereas, as Sassi shows, in the Pseudo-Aristotelian writing *Physiognomonica* (3d century B.C.E.) "the comparison with animal, racial, and gender types presupposes that moral perfection is embodied in the (free) male Greek citizen," the author of the *Testament of Naphtali* shows that physiognomic ideals can also be embodied in the figures of the Patriarchs.

For the purpose of the present article, it is intriguing that pagan Greek physiognomy could also avail itself of the terminology of a divine image. The fourth century C.E. Greek rhetorician Himerius, for instance, in a eulogy of Hermogenes, the proconsul of Greece, draws attention to the close ties between the latter's body and soul (48.12–15). Hermogenes' soul is praised at great length, in language derived from Plato, in particular from Plato's *Phaedrus*. Yet suddenly Himerius' praise for Hermogenes' soul develops into a tribute to his body. In a physiognomic way, the qualities of Hermogenes' soul are seen to be reflected in his body. Hermogenes' soul

> shapes its body, bringing it into conformity with its nature (σῶμα δὲ διαπλάττει πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτῆς φύσιν ἁρμόζουσα); what it seeks for it are dark eyes, a dignified face, and true symmetry of limbs, which wise men call beauty, so that, having put together a body that is beautiful and noble on both sides, it may let that body show itself forth to the human race as the image of a god (ἵνα καλόν τε καὶ γενναῖον ἐξ ἀμφοῖν τὸ σῶμα πήξασα οἷον θεοῦ τινος εἰκόνα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις παρέχῃ ἐνδάλλεσθαι). (Himerius, *Declamationes et orationes* 48.13 [trans. R.J. Penella])

This specific physiognomic approach is also very congruent with more general aesthetic appreciations of man as the image of God. In Book 1 of the Sibylline Oracles, for instance, God's own image is the model after

[12] M.M. SASSI, "Physiognomy," *OCD* 1181. On Greek physiognomy, see also S. SWAIN, ed., *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's* Physiognomy *from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), and for the relation between physiognomy and ancient philosophy esp. G. BOYS-STONES, "Physiognomy and Ancient Psychological Theory," in *Seeing the Face* (ed. S. Swain; n. 12), 19–124.

which man is created, and it is especially man's aesthetic qualities which are emphasized:

And then later he again fashioned an animate object,
making a copy from his own image, youthful man,
beautiful, wonderful.
καὶ τότε δὴ μετέπειτα πλάσεν πάλιν ἔμπνοον ἔργον
εἰκόνος ἐξ ἰδίης ἀπομαξάμενος νέον ἄνδρα
καλὸν θεσπέσιον. (*Sib. Or.* 1.22–24)

Similarly, in the Christian verses of Book 8 of the Sibylline Oracles the same physicality of God and man seem to come to the fore, although without specific aesthetic connotations. Here man is explicitly said to have been created to resemble the divine form in all respects:

Look, let us make a man like in all respects to our
form, and let us give him the life-supporting breath to have
(ποιήσωμεν ἰδοὺ πανομοίιον ἀνέρα μορφῇ
ἡμετέρῃ καὶ δῶμεν ἔχειν ζωαρκέα πνοιήν).
Though he is mortal all the things of the world will serve him;
when he is fashioned of clay we will subject all things to him.
(*Sib. Or.* 8.442–445)

Although man is fashioned of clay, his physical features are apparently divine.

2.6 Christian physical understandings of the image of God in christological and anti-Gnostic contexts

There is one final category of (possible) physical interpretations of the image of God to be explored: interpretations found in Christian texts, either in an anthropological or a christological context, that are concerned with "the embodied Christ" as the image of God, or with Christian believers taking on the same shape (σύμμορφος) as this image (Rom 8:29), or as Christ's body (Phil 3:21). I shall first discuss some Pauline texts and then continue with some patristic examples.

First, according to Paul, Christian believers assume the same shape as the image of God's son:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to become of the same shape as the image of his Son (καὶ προώρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ), in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. (Rom 8:29)

It could be the case that this process of becoming of the same shape as the image of Christ relates to the eschatological συμμόρφωσις of the believers' physical body with the physical resurrected body of Christ. This eschatological process is described in Phil 3:20–21 (notably, without recourse to the terminology of God's image), where Paul writes the following:

But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory (μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ), by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. (Phil 3:20–21)

In her study on the Pauline notion of God's image, Stefanie Lorenzen argues on the basis of these passages that Paul's use of this notion differs from Philo and the author of the Wisdom of Solomon. Lorenzen maintains that Paul is also referring to the body, because for him the body is a medium of the Christ event and thus an essential part of the likeness of man to God or Christ; the other Jewish-Alexandrian authors, she posits, have a spiritual view of the image of God.[13] It may be true that Paul's understanding of the image of God is also physical (at least in part). However, it is by no means a matter of course that one should understand the believers' συμμόρφωσις with the image of Christ in Rom 8:29 in a physical sense, along the lines of the physical eschatological συμμόρφωσις in Phil 3:20–21.[14] Not only is the later passage explicitly referring to the future, unlike Rom 8:29. More importantly, the notion of συμμόρφωσις in Rom 8:29 seems to be connected with the notion of μεταμόρφωσις in Rom 12:2, which is said to take place τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός, through the renewal of the mind; this clearly alludes to a mental rather than a physical process. The object of this μεταμόρφωσις is clearly described in 2 Cor 3:18 as a transformation whose goal is the image of God, Christ (2 Cor 4:4), and, like the transformation in Rom 12:2, it is understood as a mental, spiritual, inner process of renewal which affects one's inner being (2 Cor 4:16).[15] I will return to these passages in Part 3, on the spiritual understanding of the image of God, but adduce them already here to argue that it is not as clear-cut as Lorenzen suggests that the συμμόρφωσις with the image of Christ in Rom 8:29 should be understood in a physical sense. True, the carrying of the image of the earthly and the heavenly Adam in 1 Cor 15:47–49, where Paul uses the pagan imagery of carrying round images in procession,[16] takes place in the body: the earthly and the heavenly body, respectively (cf. 1 Cor 15:42–

[13] ST. LORENZEN, *Das paulinische Eikon-Konzept: Semantische Analysen zur Sapientia Salomonis, zu Philo und den Paulusbriefen* (WUNT 2/250; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

[14] *Pace* LORENZEN, *Eikon-Konzept* (n. 13), 198–211.

[15] *Pace* ibid., 211–255. Lorenzen does not comment on the μεταμόρφωσις which clearly affects the mind in Rom 12:2; she refers to the bodily aspects of Rom 12:1 (ibid., 255) but completely ignores the mind of Rom 12:2.

[16] Cf. G.H. VAN KOOTEN, *Paul's Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity* (WUNT 232; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 71–73, 86, 112–114.

46 and 11:7). Yet this does not necessarily imply that the image itself is physical. Rom 8:29 may also be about a physical συμμόρφωσις, but this does not mean that Paul's notion of the image of God is exclusively physical, as opposed to the spiritual interpretation of God's image in the Jewish-Alexandrian tradition, as Lorenzen claims.[17] I grant that Paul's understanding of the συμμόρφωσις with the image of Christ may be physical, insofar as the συμμόρφωσις described in Phil 3:20–21 (notably without reference to the image) clearly affects the believers' bodily constitution, since their physical body is eschatologically changed into the constitution of Christ's resplendent body. Yet this means at best that Paul's understanding of the image of God has both physical and spiritual aspects. The spiritual meaning is clearly alluded to in the μεταμόρφωσις described in 2 Cor 3–4 and Rom 12, and I am inclined to say that in Paul's writings this spiritual meaning is the dominant one.

Subsequently, however, many patristic authors felt the need to emphasize the physical aspects of man as God's image. It seems they felt the urge to do so in the context of their anti-Gnostic polemics, which prompted them to affirm the importance of man's physicality. Irenaeus, for instance, emphasizes that man in his entirety, including his physicality, is in God's image:

> Man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a *part* of the man, but certainly not *the* man; for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God. (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.6.1)

A similar view is taken by Tertullian, in his reflections on the bodily resurrections:

> To recapitulate, then: Shall that very flesh, which the Divine Creator formed with His own hands in the image of God; which He animated with His own *afflatus*, after the likeness of His own vital vigour . . . , [shall that flesh, I say], so often brought near to God, not rise again? (Tertullian, *De resurrectione carnis* 9)

Both authors clearly profess an emphatically physical understanding of the image of God.[18]

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[17] LORENZEN, *Eikon-Konzept* (n. 13), 256 and 257–263.

[18] For the anti-Gnostically inspired emphasis on the physical nature of the image of God, cf. A.-G. HAMMAN, *L'homme, image de Dieu: Essai d'une anthropologie chrétienne dans l'Église des cinq premiers siècles* (Paris: Desclée, 1987), 55–57, 66 (Irenaeus), 88, 91 (Tertullian). For the relation between body and soul within the image of God, cf. also F.G. MCLEOD, "The Antiochene Tradition Regarding the Role of the Body within the 'Image of God'," in *Broken and Whole: Essays on Religion and the Body* (ed. A. Maureen and S.A. Ross; Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1995), 23–53.

Before I continue with Part 3 of this article, concerning the spiritual understanding of God's image, there is one final issue in Paul's writings which should be addressed here, as it may provide support for a physical understanding of God's image in the Pauline writings, thus counterbalancing the spiritualizing tendency of my interpretation of Paul's view of the image of God. This issue is the very term "form of God" (μορφὴ θεοῦ), which Paul uses in Phil 2:6. If there is a physical understanding of God's image in Paul's writings, it may be related to this term. First of all, it is this "morphic" term which also recurs in the notion of becoming of the same form as Christ's resplendent body (σύμμορφος τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ) in Phil 3:20–21 (see above). Moreover, as we saw in ch. 2.4 above, the term "form of God" is such an important term in the discourse about the form of the gods in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, in which Velleius emphasizes the anthropomorphic, physical features of God, whereas Cotta affirms the theomorphic features of man. For these reasons it is important to assess the meaning of μορφὴ θεοῦ in Phil 2:6. The assessment of Phil 2:6, both in its immediate context in Phil 2:6–8 and against the background of the ancient philosophical discussion about the form of the gods, reveals that the μορφὴ θεοῦ in Phil 2:6 is devoid of anthropomorphic and physical features.

First of all, the implicit antithesis between the form of God and the human form in Phil 2:6–8 shows that the μορφὴ θεοῦ in Phil 2:6 is not anthropomorphic, and therefore probably not physical. The figure known to Paul and his readers as "Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5) is the one

> who, though he was in the form of God (ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων), did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave (μορφὴν δούλου λαβών), being born in human likeness (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος). And being found in human form (καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος), he humbled himself. (Phil 2:6–8)

In this passage, Paul clearly differentiates between the "form of God" on the one hand, and the "form" (μορφή), or "likeness" (ὁμοίωμα), or "shape" (σχῆμα) of human beings on the other. Given that there is an explicit transition from the divine to the human form, and also that this transition took place through a "self-emptying," "self-depleting" process of κένωσις (Phil 2:7), it is obvious that the μορφὴ θεοῦ is not in any way anthropomorphic. This is fully in line with Paul's view at the beginning of his Letter to the Romans that it is characteristic of the distorted mind-set of the pagans that "they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of an image of a perishable human being (καὶ ἤλλαξαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου

θεοῦ ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνος φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου)" (Rom 1:23).[19] But whereas it is possible to say that the μορφὴ θεοῦ in Phil 2:6 is not in any way anthropomorphic, the assertion that it is not physical is more difficult to make; for this, we need to consider the contemporary ancient philosophical discussion about the form of the gods. As we can deduce from the discussion between Velleius and Cotta in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, the term μορφὴ θεοῦ is not in itself decisive and does not necessarily point to a physical understanding of God. After all, as we have seen, the Epicureans argue that the μορφὴ θεοῦ is of a physical, even anthropomorphic nature. However, the term is also often used in this debate to describe the belief of the non-Epicureans in the existence of a μορφὴ θεοῦ which is not physical or corporeal. Given the Epicureans' physical viewpoint, they regard all non-physical understandings of the outward forms of the gods as rather vague, and contrast their notion of anthropomorphic gods infavourably with the others' notion of a pervasive Mind which extends through the cosmos and resides in human beings. Indeed, according to Velleius, commenting on the views of both Platonists and Stoics,

> Those . . . who said that the world is itself endowed with life and with wisdom, failed entirely to discern what shape (*figura*) the nature of an intelligent living being could conceivably possess. (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.23)

Yet in his specific criticisms of the various non-Epicurean positions, Velleius admits that the other philosophers do reflect on the form of the gods, even though he ridicules Plato, for instance, for believing that God is of a spherical shape (1.24). In his criticism of, successively, the Presocratics (1.25–29), the Platonists (1.30–35), the Stoics (1.36–41), and the poets (1.42–43), he makes the following observations.

Velleius censures the Presocratics for various beliefs: for maintaining that God is *aer sine ulla forma* ("formless air," Anaximenes), which falls short of his own belief "that it is proper to god to possess not merely some shape but the most beautiful shape," i.e., the anthropomorphic shape (1.26); for holding that "the orderly disposition of the universe is designed and perfected by the rational power of an infinite mind" (Anaxagoras), which dissatisfies Velleius because "mind . . . will have an outer integument of body" as "mind naked and simple, without any material adjunct to serve as an organ of sensation" seems incomprehensible (1.26–27); and for

[19] Cf. Balbus' Stoic criticism of mythological religion, very similar to Paul's stance in many ways, which changes the original "true and valuable philosophy of nature" into an anthropomorphic, immoral religion in which all about the gods "is distorted into the likeness of human frailty (*omniaque traducta ad similitudinem inbecillitatis humanae*). They are actually represented as liable to passions and emotions" (Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.70).

assuming that a crown-like "unbroken ring of glowing lights," which encircles the sky, is God (Parmenides), whereas according to Velleius "no one can imagine this to possess divine form" (1.28). Similarly, it is unclear to Velleius how, as Diogenes of Apollonia believes, air can have any "shape of divinity (*forma dei*)" (1.29).

As regards the Epicurean Velleius' criticism of the Platonists, it is relevant to note that, although Plato's view on the issue has already been described as a belief in spherical shape of God (1.24), at the same time he is said to hold that God is "entirely incorporeal, in Greek "dis-embodied" (*vero sine corpore ullo . . ., ut Graeci dicunt* ἀσώματον)." This goes against Velleius' materialistic assumption that "divine incorporeity is inconceivable, for an incorporeal deity would necessarily be incapable of sensation" (1.30). In his description of the Platonic school, Velleius unceasingly calls attention to what he perceives as inconsistent, unintelligible, or imprecise views on the issue of the divine form. Not only Plato is inconsistent (1.30), but also Socrates: Xenophon "represents Socrates as arguing that it is wrong to inquire about the form of God (*rettulit Socratem disputantem formam dei quaeri non oportere*), but also as saying that both the sun and the soul are god" (1.31). Aristotle, like Plato, is criticized for maintaining that God is incorporeal (1.33), and Xenocrates is censured for giving "no intelligible account of the divine form" (1.34). Heraclides of Pontus, moreover, at one point mistakenly

> deems the world divine, at another the intellect; he also assigns divinity to the planets, and holds that the deity is devoid of sensation and mutable of form; and again in the same volume he reckons earth and sky as gods. (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.34)

Indeed, as P.G. Walsh puts it in his commentary on this passage, Heraclides "is adduced as further evidence of the Platonists' identification of divinity with the physical world. The notion of a pervasive Mind, investing the world with eternal movement and life, is implicitly contrasted with the Epicurean notion of anthropomorphic gods."[20]

The Stoics' views on the issue are treated in the same way: they are accused of sheer mistakes, inconsistencies, and obscurities. Like Xenophon's Socrates, the Stoic Aristo, a pupil of Zeno, is said to think "that the form of the deity cannot be comprehended (*neque formam dei intellegi posse censeat*)" (1.37), whereas Cleanthes is portrayed as someone who

> babbles like one demented, now imagining gods of some definite shape and form (*tum fingit formam quandam et speciem deorum*), now assigning full divinity to the stars, now pronouncing that nothing is more divine than reason. The result is that the god . . . has utterly and entirely vanished. (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.37)

[20] WALSH, *Cicero* (n. 7), 155.

It is indeed true that the Stoics themselves could believe in corporeal gods, as the Stoic Balbus in Cicero's *De natura deorum* demonstrates. According to Balbus, "the gods often manifest their power in bodily presence (*praesentes saepe di vim suam declarant*)," and he himself gives many examples from recorded epiphanies, before concluding as follows:

> . . . often has the apparition of a divine form (*visae formae deorum*) compelled anyone that is not either feeble-minded or impious to admit the real presence of the gods (*saepe visae formae deorum quemvis non aut hebetem aut impium deos praesentes esse confiteri coegerunt*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.6)

To this extent, Stoics and Epicureans seem to agree, and these Stoic views are also criticized by the Academic Cotta (3.11). Yet the Stoics also differ from the Epicureans, as Balbus reveals. As Balbus argues, in order to appreciate the qualities of the divine nature, it is important, if difficult, to be aware that the gods are not (or not only) visible and anthropomorphic, but that God as a pervasive Mind permeates the entire universe (2.45–47).[21] Balbus is keen to present this view as an explicit criticism both of the uneducated and of the Epicurean philosophers:

> It remains for us to consider the qualities of the divine nature; and on this subject nothing is more difficult than to divert the eye of the mind from following the practice of bodily sight. This difficulty has caused both uneducated people generally and those philosophers who resemble the uneducated to be unable to conceive of the immortal gods without setting before themselves the forms of men (*ut nisi figuris hominum constitutis nihil possent de dis inmortalibus cogitare*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.45)

In response to the Epicurean view that the gods exist only in anthropomorphic form, Balbus argues at length that God pervades the entire universe, and that, in that sense, there is "a vast company of gods," who – in contrast to the anthropomorphic form which the Epicureans regard as the only appropriate form for the gods – "are endowed with supreme beauty of form" (2.59).

From this discussion about the form of the gods in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, it becomes clear that non-Epicurean philosophers, too, notably the Platonists and the Stoics, used the terminology of the *forma dei*, the μορφὴ

[21] Cf. the description of the Stoic position in Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 7.147 (= *SVF* 2:1021): "The deity, say they, is a living being, immortal, rational, perfect or intelligent in happiness, admitting nothing evil [into him], taking providential care of the world and all that therein is, but he is not of human shape (μὴ εἶναι μέντοι ἀνθρωπόμορφον). He is, however, the artificer of the universe and, as it were, the father of all, both in general and in that particular part of him which is all-pervading, and which is called many names according to its various powers. They give him the name Dia (Δία) because all things are due to (διά) him."

θεοῦ, as applied by Paul in Phil 2:6. Given the contrast with the anthropomorphic form taken by "Christ Jesus," it seems likely that Paul shared with the Platonists and Stoics the sense of a non-anthropomorphic and, at least in the case of the Platonists, also non-physical, non-corporeal form of God. According to the Platonists and Stoics, this form of God consists of a pervasive Mind, closely identified with reason, which pervades the entire universe and also resides in the human mind. It is to this view that we now turn in our discussion of the spiritual understanding of the image of God.

3. The intellectual, spiritual understanding of man as God's image

3.1 Philo's intellectual interpretation of the image of God in his criticism of mythological and Epicurean anthropomorphism

The emergence of a clearly spiritual, non-physical understanding of man as God's image within early Judaism can be clearly seen in the writings of Philo of Alexandria. Although the present article will not delve into the many passages on the image of God in his œuvre, I will draw attention to two passages which are particularly relevant for the present purpose.[22] In his treatise on the creation of the world, Philo makes it very clear that the creation of humankind in God's image (Gen 1:26–27) is to be understood in a spiritual, not a physical sense:

> Moses tells us that man was created after the image of God and after his likeness. Right well does he say this, for nothing earth-born is more like God than man (ἐμφερέστερον γὰρ οὐδὲν γηγενὲς ἀνθρώπου θεῷ). Let no one represent the likeness as one to a bodily form (τὴν δ' ἐμφέρειαν μηδεὶς εἰκαζέτω σώματος χαρακτῆρι). For neither is God in human form, nor is the human body God-like (οὔτε γὰρ ἀνθρωπόμορφος ὁ θεὸς οὔτε θεοειδὲς τὸ ἀνθρώπειον σῶμα). No, it is in respect of the mind, the sovereign element of the soul, that the word "image" is used (ἡ δὲ εἰκὼν λέλεκται κατὰ τὸν τῆς ψυχῆς ἡγεμόνα νοῦν). (Philo, *Opif.* 69)

Philo's admonitory and even polemical tone is understandable if we consider his writings against the background of the plethora of Jewish, Christian, and pagan philosophical views discussed in the first part of this article, all in one way or another emphasizing the physicality of God's image. Philo shows himself to be very conscious of this and in another treatise even specifies his criticism by singling out the Epicureans and Greek mythologists in particular. In commenting on an anthropomorphic (or appar-

[22] For a comprehensive treatment of the notion of the image of God in Philo's œuvre, see VAN KOOTEN, *Paul's Anthropology* (n. 16), 48–69.

ently anthropomorphic) passage in Gen 4:16 ("Then Cain went away from the face of the Lord"), Philo suggests whom his criticism of a bodily understanding of God's image is directed against: he is critical of the Greeks – both the views of philosophers such as the Epicureans and anthropomorphic representations of the gods in Greek mythology in general – and of the animal worship of the Egyptians, which takes the misconception of God one step further. Philo discusses the question of whether God indeed has a face, then vehemently denies it:

> For if the Existent Being had a face, and he that wished to quit its sight could with perfect ease remove elsewhere, what ground would we have for rejecting the impious doctrines of Epicurus, or the atheism of the Egyptians, or the mythical plots of plays and poems of which the world is full? (Philo, *Post.* 2)

As we saw above, in the discussion of the debate between the Epicurean, Academic, and Stoic philosophers in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, the question of the form of God was hotly debated in contemporary philosophy. But although the Epicurean position was certainly the most radically anthropomorphic, they were by no means alone in these views. Many Jews, Christians, and philosophers subscribed to similar, if slightly less radical, anthropomorphic interpretations of man as God's image, or, particularly in the case of the philosophers, were at least willing to justify such views. There were, however, alternative views, such as those of Philo and others, which I will now briefly discuss.

3.2 Instances of Jewish and Christian spiritual and intellectual interpretations of the image of God

Philo's strong advocacy of a spiritual, intellectual understanding of the image of God "in respect of the mind, the sovereign element of the soul" may be exceptional, but there are other instances of a spiritual interpretation among Jews, Christians and pagans. Examples from Jewish writings include Sirach, which clarifies the notion of God's creation of human beings "in his own image" by stating that "He filled them with knowledge and understanding" (17:3–7), and, among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the *Words of the Luminaries*[a], which clarifies Adam's formation in the likeness of God's glory by adding that God blew the breath of life into his nostril, "and intelligence and knowledge" (4Q504 8 IV – VII). Similarly, the Wisdom of Solomon also bears witness to a spiritualizing interpretation: its author argues against a materialist position (1:16–2:24) that man's soul is immortal, basing this conviction on the fact that God "made us in the image of his own eternity (καὶ εἰκόνα τῆς ἰδίας ἀϊδιότητος ἐποίησεν αὐτόν)" (2:23). A similar anti-materialist polemic can be detected in the *Sententiae* of Pseudo-Phocylides, who challenges contemporary anatomical interest in the

dissection of bodies by contending that the soul is far more important: "the spirit is a loan of God to mortals, and (his) image (πνεῦμα γάρ ἐστι θεοῦ χρῆσις θνητοῖσι καὶ εἰκών)" (106). These writings show that from the second century B.C.E. onwards, at least, a more spiritualizing interpretation of God's image emerges. It is striking that, as in the case of Philo's explicit polemic against the Epicureans, some of these sources, notably the Wisdom of Solomon and Pseudo-Phocylides' *Sententiae*, have a similar polemic bearing, as if an interpretation which equates the image of God with the mind and the soul emerges in contention with older physical interpretations.

A spiritual, intellectual understanding of God's image is also apparent in the texts known as the *Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers*, preserved in the *Constitutiones apostolicae*.[23] And in the Christian verses of Book 8 of the *Sibylline Oracles*, such a reading is rendered explicit in the following statement: "Man is my image, having right reason (εἰκών ἐστ' ἄνθρωπος ἐμὴ λόγον ὀρθὸν ἔχουσα)" (*Sib. Or.* 8.402). Interestingly, this image is contrasted with the idol images of pagan cult: "Godless ones also call their images gods (καὶ καλέουσι θεοὺς ἄθεοι τὰς εἰκόνας αὐτῶν)" (8.395). The bloody sacrificial cult of the pagans, who are described as "performing a godless and destructive worship (θρησκείαν ἄθεον καὶ ὀλέθριον ἐκτελέοντες)" (8.394), is set in opposition to "the living sacrifice," which they are encouraged to provide instead: "provide for me, the living one, a living sacrifice (καὶ ζῶσαν θυσίαν ἐμοὶ τῷ ζῶντι πόριζε)" (8.408). I am very much inclined to read Paul's passages on the image of God in this context. As I have already argued above, it seems that Paul's notion of a μεταμόρφωσις into the image of God/Christ in 2 Cor 3:18 is understood as a process of inner transformation, which is located in the "inner man" (2 Cor 4:16) – a Platonic designation for the highest part of the soul[24] – and takes place through the renewal of the mind (Rom 12:2). This μεταμόρφωσις, according to Paul, is the essence of his religion, which is characterized as a "logical, rational" worship of God. This characterization also comes very close to Balbus' Stoic defence of true religion, which is depicted as a veneration of the gods "through a pure, sincere and innocent mind and voice," as opposed to mythological religion:

> But the best and also the purest, holiest and most pious way of worshipping the gods is ever to venerate them with purity, sincerity and innocence both of thought and of speech

[23] See *Hel. Syn. Pr.* 3:18–21 (*Const. ap.* 7.34.1–8; *OTP* II, 678–680) and 12:35–40 (*Const. ap.* 8.12.6–27; *OTP* II, 690–694).

[24] On the history of the concept of the "inner man," see VAN KOOTEN, *Paul's Anthropology* (n. 16), 357–388. For a very different interpretation, cf. LORENZEN, *Eikon-Konzept* (n. 13), 238–240.

(*Cultus autem deorum est optimus idemque castissimus atque sanctissimus plenissimusque pietatis ut eos semper pura integra incorrupta et mente et voce veneremur*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.71)

According to Paul, it is in this rational worship that the believers offer no ordinary sacrifices, but themselves as "a living sacrifice":

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your rational worship (παραστῆσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν). Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds (ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός), so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:1–2)

It seems no coincidence that there are many similarities between this passage and the lines just quoted from the Christian verses of Book 8 of the *Sibylline Oracles*. The definition of God's image in the verses as "man . . . having right reason (ἄνθρωπος . . . λόγον ὀρθὸν ἔχουσα)" (8.402) and the qualification of his religion as the offering of "a living sacrifice" (8.408) as opposed to the "godless and destructive worship" of the pagans (8.394) can be seen as reflections of Paul's stipulation of his religion as a λογικὴ λατρεία (Rom 12:1), a "logical, rational" worship of God, i.e., a worship through reason (λόγος), which takes place "through the renewal of the mind (νοῦς)" (Rom 12:2), and in which humankind offers itself as "a living sacrifice (θυσία ζῶσα)" (Rom 12:1). The phrase θυσία ζῶσα occurs only twice in the extant Greek literature: in Rom 12:1 and in *Sibylline Oracles* 8.408. It is highly likely, then, that these passages can be read in unison, and that the μεταμόρφωσις of the mind in Rom 12:1–2 is similar to what Paul elsewhere calls the μεταμόρφωσις into the image of God (2 Cor 3:18; 4:4). Against this background, it becomes more likely that the believers' συμμόρφωσις with the image of Christ in Rom 8:29, which we discussed above (see ch. 2.6), alludes to this intellectual renewal of the mind, and not to the eschatological physical συμμόρφωσις of the believers' body with the resplendent body of the resurrected Christ in Phil 3:20–21.[25] One could argue that this eschatological physical συμμόρφωσις, which affects the body, is the final completion and culmination of a συμμόρφωσις with the image of Christ. The early stages already take place now, and are primarily intellectual as the process transforms and renews the inner being

[25] *Pace* LORENZEN, *Eikon-Konzept* (n. 13), 198–211 on Rom 8:29, and 255 on Rom 12:1 where she draws one-sided attention to "the bodies" in Rom 12:1 while ignoring "the mind," and the μεταμόρφωσις and renewal in which it is involved in Rom 12:2. The "bodies" in Rom 12:1 should not be understood as exclusively physical entities, but rather as the loci of a tripartite anthropology which comprises body, soul and spirit/mind (see VAN KOOTEN, *Paul's Anthropology* [n. 16], 269–312).

(2 Cor 4:16) and the mind (Rom 12:2). This present μεταμόρφωσις affects and progressively strengthens "the inner man," whereas "the outer man," the physical man, is actually utterly destroyed: εἰ καὶ ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, ἀλλ' ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαινοῦται ἡμέρᾳ καὶ ἡμέρᾳ (2 Cor 4:16). In that sense Paul's understanding of the image of God is primarily intellectual, and not physical, though in the end it comprises both the body and the mind.

It is important to note that this spiritual, intellectual μεταμόρφωσις is inextricably linked with a simultaneous ethical process. As Rom 12:2 explicates, the μεταμόρφωσις through the renewal of the mind directly issues from a process of δοκιμάζειν . . . τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον, of discerning what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. This, in Paul's view, is a clear result of the renewal of the mind: the original mind has become ἀδόκιμος (Rom 1:28), because humankind no longer sees fit to recognize God. As a result, God surrenders them to an "unsatisfactory, discredited, untrustworthy mind" (ἀδόκιμος νοῦς), so that they are prone to doing what is ethically unsuitable: καὶ καθὼς οὐκ ἐδοκίμασαν τὸν θεὸν ἔχειν ἐν ἐπιγνώσει, παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν, ποιεῖν τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα (Rom 1:28). This moral degeneration is seen as an immediate result of the fact that, in complete reversal of their own identity as image of God, human beings have erred:

> Although claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being (φάσκοντες εἶναι σοφοὶ ἐμωράνθησαν, καὶ ἤλλαξαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ ἀφθάρτου θεοῦ ἐν ὁμοιώματι εἰκόνος φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου). (Rom 1:22–23)

Now, through a transformational process of renewal, the mind (νοῦς) becomes, as it were, δόκιμος ("trustworthy") again, in the sense that it can again δοκιμάζειν . . . τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, discern what is the will of God (Rom 12:2). The almost complete antithesis between Rom 1:22–23, 28 on the one hand, and Rom 12:1–2 on the other seems to be very deliberate. This strengthens the likelihood that Paul understood the believers' συμμόρφωσις with the image of Christ in Rom 8:29 as a spiritual, intellectual, and ethical process. Just as man's debasement of God to the likeness of an image of a perishable human being leads to the debasement of his own mind, and to his subsequent unethical behaviour, so the συμμόρφωσις with Christ, as the image of God, leads to the renewal of his mind, and to an active, ethical contemplation of the will of God. This divine will is not defined in a voluntaristic way, but is equated, in a rather philosophical and ethical way, with τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον: the good, the well-pleasing and acceptable, and the perfect.

This ethical understanding of the image of God is confirmed by one of the earliest echoes of Paul in the Letter to the Colossians, where the readers are exhorted as follows:

> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old man with its practices (μὴ ψεύδεσθε εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἀπεκδυσάμενοι τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον σὺν ταῖς πράξεσιν αὐτοῦ) and have clothed yourselves with the new man, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator (καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι τὸν νέον τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν). (Col 3:9–10)

The ethical injunction to be trustworthy for one's fellow human beings is based on the renewal of man's intellectual capacity (ἐπίγνωσις), which is brought into harmony with the image of God himself. It is exactly this passage which Origen quotes in his polemic with Celsus, who, as we have seen above in ch. 2.3, understands the mention of the image of God in Gen 1:26–27 as a reference to a physical form of God. Although many Jewish, Christian, and also pagan Greek testimonies show that the image of God was understood in such a sense, Origen firmly argues for a spiritual, intellectual reading of the image of God in Gen 1:26–27, adducing the passage in Col 3:9–10. According to Origen, Celsus

> failed to understand to what characteristic of man the words "in the image of God" (Gen 1:26–27) apply, and that this exists in the soul which either has not possessed or possesses no longer "the old man with his deeds" (Col 3:9), and which, as a result of not possessing this, is said to be in the image of the Creator (Col 3:10). He [i.e., Celsus] says: Nor did he make man his image; for God is not like that, nor does he resemble any other form at all. (Origen, *Cels.* 6.63)

The irony which this passage conveys seems to be that, across the Christian-pagan divide, Origen and Celsus actually agree more on the non-physical nature of God, than do Celsus and his fellow-Platonist Porphyry. The latter, as we saw above, is prepared to justify the anthropomorphic forms of the statues of the gods to a certain extent, with reference to the Jewish Scriptures (see ch. 2.3). However, what is most relevant for the present purposes is that Origen's response confirms what we saw in the passages from the Pauline writings quoted above: that a spiritual, intellectual understanding of the image of God leads to a newly argued type of ethics. Whereas a physical understanding of man as God's image is connected with what we can describe as numinous ethics, in which the sacrosanctity of human beings is based on their physical resemblance to God, or as physiognomic ethics, in which the morality of individual humans is deduced from their physical appearance, a spiritual understanding seems to result in a transformational type of ethics, according to which human beings are progressively conformed or assimilated to God through virtue. Interestingly, not only does this seem to be the rationale behind Paul's terminology of συμμόρφωσις and μεταμόρφωσις, but this type of ethics also

comes to the fore in the Academic Cotta's criticism of Velleius' Epicurean position in Cicero's *De natura deorum*, as we shall see in the next section.

3.3 Theomorphic ethics: Cotta on establishing a resemblance with the gods through virtue

As we saw in ch. 2.4 above, the Academic Cotta criticizes Velleius' Epicurean anthropocentrism, arguing that instead of believing that the gods are in anthropomorphic form, one should state, on account of the priority of the immortal gods over man, that the human form is divine. Against the background of Paul's distinctly "morphic" terminology of συμμόρφωσις and μεταμόρφωσις, I shall quote the relevant passage again verbatim, to highlight the similarity in morphic language. According to Cotta,

> the gods did not derive the pattern of their form from men (*non ab hominibus formae figuram venisse ad deos*); since the gods have always existed, and were never born – that is, if they are to be eternal; whereas men were born; therefore the human form existed before mankind, and it was the form of the immortal gods (*ante igitur humana forma quam homines, eaque erant forma di inmortales*). We ought not to say that the gods have human form, but that our form is divine (*Non ergo illorum humana forma sed nostra divina dicenda est*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.90)

As we have likewise seen, Cotta subsequently ridicules the Epicureans' denial that human beings are related to the gods and criticizes their view "that our likeness was caused by chance (*casu esse factum ut essemus similes deorum*)" (1.90–91). In response to the Epicureans' position, and along the theomorphic lines he espouses, Cotta now builds up an argument to show how such a likeness can be achieved. This line of reasoning brings him into close proximity to Paul's argumentation in Rom 12. Cotta first states that the Epicureans are wrong to ridicule "the philosophers from Thales of Miletus downward" for pronouncing that "god can exist without hands or feet" (i.e., that God is not in anthropomorphic shape), and to regard these philosophers as "fools, idiots and madmen" (1.91–94). Instead, Cotta suggests, it is the Epicureans' own anthropomorphism that is extremely dubious (1.94): he questions the necessary link Velleius posits between the happiness of the gods and their possessing the form of man (1.95). Cotta disputes the Epicureans' assumption that the most aesthetic shape which befits God as the most exalted being is the human form, and asks whether beauty cannot apply "to some eternal intelligence devoid of bodily shape and members" (1.95). Instead, Cotta argues, just as God, as the supremely excellent, happy and eternal being, surpasses human beings in immortality and mental excellence, he is also their superior in physical form:

Why then, if we are inferior to God in all else, are we his equals in form? For man came nearer to the divine image in virtue than in outward aspect (*ad similitudinem enim deorum proprius accedebat humana virtus quam figura*). (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.96)

Cotta completes his criticism of Epicurean anthropomorphism, and his concomitant alternative plea for a theomorphic perspective, by stating that the *similitudo deorum*, the likeness to the gods, is established through virtue, not through outward form. This is exactly the same point of view as is taken by Paul, where he depicts man's transformation into God's image as an inner process which affects not the outer, but the inner man (2 Cor 3:18; 4:4, 16). This process comprises the transformation of the mind and the renewal of one's ethical judgement and behaviour (Rom 12:2). It is not surprising that Cotta, as an Academic philosopher, proposes this perspective. After all, it was within the Platonic Academy of the first century B.C.E. that Eudorus developed Plato's notion of the assimilation to God through virtue (Plato, *Theaetetus* 176c) into a full ethical theory.[26] Both Paul and Cotta believe that the likeness between God and human beings is established through virtue. And if we extrapolate Cotta's plea for theomorphism in 1.90 and link it with his statement in 1.96 about how the likeness of human beings to the gods is established, the similarity between Cotta and Paul becomes even closer and fully reflects their common endorsement of the Platonic view of man's assimilation to God through virtue.

To some extent, Cotta's censure of Velleius' Epicurean anthropomorphism is strongly biased, as if Cotta's own theomorphic ethics contrast sharply with superficial Epicurean anthropomorphic aesthetics. This depiction is correct insofar as Epicurean materialistic anthropology as such does

[26] On Plato's assimilation to God, see, inter alia D. SEDLEY, "The ideal of godlikeness," in *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul* (ed. G. Fine; Oxford Readings in Philosophy; Oxford: OUP, 1999), 309–328. For the history of this Platonic doctrine from Plato to Plotinus, and for Paul's appropriation of this way of thinking, see VAN KOOTEN, *Paul's Anthropology* (n. 16), ch. 2, 92–219. Cf., however, P.G. Walsh in his commentary on 1.96: "Cotta uses Stoic arguments to rebut the Epicurean claims, whereas at 3.38 he roundly rejects the Stoic notion that God has need of the cardinal virtues" (WALSH, *Cicero* [n. 7], 168). I would rather explain Cotta's argumentation in the context of the Platonic doctrine of assimilation to God, but I agree that his positive stance here in 1.96 is at odds with his generally sceptical Academic attitude, as demonstrated in 1.57–61, where he professes that he always finds "it much easier to think of arguments to prove a thing false than to prove it true" (1.57) and is "more ready to say what is not true than what is" (1.60); cf. also 2.2–3. For the notion of assimilation to God and New Testament ethics, cf. also A. KLOSTERGAARD PETERSEN, "Finding a Basis for Interpreting New Testament Ethos from a Greco-Roman Philosophical Perspective," in *Early Christian Ethics in Interaction with Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts* (ed. Jan Willem van Henten and Joseph Verheyden; Studies in Theology and Religion 17; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 53–82 (75ff.).

not contain an ethical dimension. Yet, as Michael Erler has demonstrated, despite their materialistic orientation, the Epicureans, too, applied Plato's notion of the assimilation to God in their philosophy and ethics.[27] Admittedly, they did ensure that this assimilation applied to the Epicurean God. Just as the Epicurean God "is entirely inactive and free from all ties of occupation," does neither toil nor labour, but "takes delight in his own wisdom and virtue" (1.51), and – in a way very similar to the Aristotelian God[28] – "is engaged . . . in ceaseless contemplation of his own happiness, for he has no other object for his thoughts" (1.114), so the Epicurean philosophers, too, in their assimilation to this god, enjoy the same ἀταραξία, the same impassiveness and calmness: "tranquility of mind and entire exemption from all duties" (1.53). Nevertheless, it is clear that there is a considerable difference between such a passive Epicurean ethics and Cotta's and Paul's progressive ethics of establishing a resemblance with God through virtue. It is the spiritual, intellectual understanding of man as an image and resemblance of God that becomes an important means of expression for such a theomorphic ethics.

4. Concluding reflections

In this article we looked at the anthropological notion of man as God's image, and particularly tried to establish the significance of this notion for ethics. To this end, we studied not only texts from the Jewish Scriptures, early Judaism, and New Testament writings, but also from Graeco-Roman philosophy. It emerged that the discourse about man as the image of God and the related discussion about the specific form of the gods are broadly attested among Jews, Christians and ancient philosophers, and that there are many cross-references or similarities between their positions, and even comparable pairs of opposites. Broadly speaking there are two different interpretations of man as God's image, which give rise to rather divergent types of ethics.

Firstly, there is a physical understanding of God's image, which posits the similarity between God and human beings in their common material shape. In contrast to a spiritual, intellectual understanding, this view does not necessarily give rise to a particular ethical position. This emerges most

[27] M. ERLER, "Epicurus as *Deus mortalis*: *Homoiosis theoi* and Epicurean Self-Cultivation," in *Traditions of Theology: Studies in Hellenistic Theology, Its Background and Aftermath* (ed. Dorothea Frede and André Laks; Philosophia antiqua 89; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 159–181.

[28] Cf. P.G. WALSH, in his comments on 1.51 (*Cicero* [n. 7], 159).

clearly in the case of Epicureanism, where the emphasis on the gods' anthropomorphic resemblance with man is highly aesthetically charged. Yet the physical understanding can also be combined with some distinctive ethical considerations. As we have seen, the physical resemblance between God and man can be used for either numinous or physiognomic forms of ethics. A numinous ethics, which we encounter in Jewish, Christian, and Aristotelian writings, bases man's sacrosanctity on the correspondence between God and man in their bodily shape. In this way, it argues for what we, in modern terms, may call man's inalienable "physical integrity," which has come to be seen as a fundamental human right. Physiognomic ethics, on the other hand, which also derives from a physical understanding of man as God's image, is rather different. It is perhaps less moral, as man's physical embodiment is seen as an expression of the virtuous nature of his soul. It is interesting to note that such a physiognomic perspective is found right across the spectrum of Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian sources.

In the second place, there is a spiritual, intellectual understanding of God, which is far more directly, almost axiomatically, linked with ethics. It seems as if an intellectual correspondence between God and man almost necessarily leads to a theomorphic perspective, which induces human beings to conform to the ethical nature of God. This theomorphic ethics seems to emerge gradually from the 1st century B.C.E. onwards. It too is found across the spectrum of ancient philosophers, Jews, and Christians, although among the latter two groups it is more prevalent in the philosophically inclined, such as Philo of Alexandria and St Paul. Comparing it to the numinous ethics of man's sacrosanct physical integrity, one could perhaps say that whereas the numinous ethics is predominantly prohibitive in nature – as exemplified in the negative wording of the *Testament of Isaac*, "Do not profane the image of God by how you treat it; for the image of man was made like the image of God" (*T. Isaac* 6:33–7:1; see ch. 2.1 above) – , theomorphic ethics provides more of a positive encouragement. It centres on virtue as the way to establish a resemblance with God. Theomorphic ethics seems gradually to emerge as an alternative to both numinous ethics and anthropomorphic aesthetics.

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